

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 HA-05 MCT-02 ACDA-12 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00
OMB-01 NEA-10 /116 W
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R 271600Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1431
INFO AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
AMZMBASSY COTONOU 208
AMZMBASSY KHARTOUM 069
AMZMBASSY KINSHASA 1958
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMZMBASSY PARIS 2602
AMZMBASSY RABAT 142
USMISSION GENEVA
USICA

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 2066
E.O. 11652: GDA
TAGS: PINT,HPEPR, GB, DM
SUBJECT: BENINESE EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY: "AFFAIRE KEREKOU"

KINSHASA FOR RSO

REF: (W)LIBREVILLE 2022 (B)LIBERVILLE 2038 (C)LIBREVILLE 2051 (MOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: "AFFAIRE KEREKOU" RETURNED AGAIN TO FRONT PAGE OF LIBREVILLE'S "L'UNION" OF JULY 27 WITH EXTENSIVE COVERAGE GIVEN TO TEXT OF TELEGRAM FROM PRESIDENT BONGO TO SUDAN'S PRESIDENT NIMEIRY IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF OAU. IN MESSAGE BONGO SUMMARIZES EVENTS LEADING UP TO DECISION TO REPATRIATE BENINESE COMMUNITY AND ASKS NIMZIRY TO INFORM OAU MEMBERS OF SITUATION AND MEASURES TAKEN BY GOG. IN ADDITION TO BONGO'S TELEGRAM, ARTICLE BRIEFLY CONVERS SOCIAL ASPECTS
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AND CONSEQUENCES OF REPATRIATION AND DESCRIBES MEASURES TAKEN BY GOG TO ISURE WELFARE, HEALTH, AND SAFETY OF BENINESE WHILE REPATRIATION PROCEDURES ARE BEING WORKED OUT. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBREVILLE'S "L'UNION" OF JULY 27 CARRIED REPORTED TEXT OF TELEGRAM TO SUDAN PRESIDENT NIMZIRY IN HIS CAPACITY AS OAU PRESIDENT. ACCORDING TO ARTICLE, BONGO STATED THAT ABUSE LEVELED

ON HIM AND HIS COUNTRY BY BENIN PRESIDENT KEREKOU AT OAU SUMMIT IN KHARTOUM HAD PROVOKED STRONG REACTION BY GABONESE THROUGHOUT GABON. PEOPLE'S ANGER, WHICH CONTAINED FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR IN FACE OF REPEATED PROVOCATIONS FROM COTONOU, HAD LITERALLY EXPLODED AS RESULT OF INSULTS HURLED AT BONGO FROM OAU PODIUM BY ONE "UNRESPONSABLE" WHO DID NOT CONSIDER CONSEQUENCES OF HIS WORDS ON BENINESE WHO HAD BEEN LIVING IN GABON IN PEACE FOR YEARS AND WHO HAD PROFITED FROM THE ECONOMIC EXPANSION OF GABON.

3. FORTUNATELY, NO LOSS OF LIFE HAD TAKEN PLACE SO FAR BUT SOME HAD BEEN INJURED. TO AVOID FURTHER DIFFICULTY AND AGGRAVATION OF SITUATION, GOG HAD DECIDED TO PROCEED WITH REPATRIATION OF BENINESE COMMUNITY IN BRIEFLY POSSIBLE TIME WITH EXCEPTION OF THOSE WITH LEGAL REFUGEE STATUS AND THOSE WHO HAD ALSO ACQUIRED GABONESE NATIONALITY. ESTIMATES OF TOTAL TO BE REPATRIATED RANGE FROM 8000 TO 9000. THESE HAVE BEEN RELOCATED FOR PAST FOUR DAYS IN CENTERS WHERE POLICE PROTECTION COULD BE ACCORDED THEM.

4. MESSAGE ASKS OAU PRESIDENT TO INFORM ALL OAU HEADS OF STATE OF THIS "GRAVE SITUATION" AND OF MEASURES TAKEN BY GOG TO SAVE LIVES AND GUARANTEE PEACE WITHIN GABON'S BORDERS. GABON REMAINS A COUNTRY OF PEACE AND HOSPITALITY, WHICH IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN, AND HAS SUCH A REPUTATION WITHIN THIS PART OF AFRICA. OTHER AFRICANS CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THEIR OCCUPATIONS IN HARMONY WITH GABONESE AS ALWAYS. BUT PEOPLES' PATIENCE LIKE THAT OF INDIVIDUALS

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HAS ITS LIMITS AND BONGO HOPED THAT THESE 8000 UNFORTUNATES WOULD FIND IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY PEACE AND WILL BEING WHICH HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY GUARANTEED TO THEM IN GABON, EVEN THOUGH REVOLUTION IN SOME PLACES IS QUOTE SYNONYMOUS WITH INSECURITY AND POVERTY UNQUOTE.

5. CONCLUDING, BONG REGRETED "SPARK WHICH CAUSED THIS FIRE TO BREAK OUT FROM THE OAU PLATFORM AT KHARTOUM," BUT NO ONE, HE SAYS, COULD HAVE IMAGINED THAT SUCH WORDS (KEREKOU'Y) COULD HAVE COME FROM MOUTH OF A HEAD OF STATE. ARTICLE THEN REPORTED THAT, ACCORDING AGENCIE FRANCE PRESSE DISPATCH OUT OF COTONOU, CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF PARTY IN BENIN WAS CONVOKED BY KEREKOU TO STUDY SITUATION OF REPATRIATES AND TO SET UP RECEPTION COMMITTEE TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS POSED BY INFLUX OF SO MANY PEOPLE, AND IN LIBREVILLE DURING AFTERNOON OF JULY 26, COMMITTEE HEADED BY PRIME MINISTER LEON MEIBAME MET TO DETERMINE METHOD OF REPATRIATING 8000 TO 9000 PEOPLE.

7. BENINESE FROM INTERIOR REGIONS, ESTIMATED AT SOME 2500 IN PORT GENTIL ALONE, ARE BEING ASSEMBLED FOR TRANSPORTATION TO LIBREVILLE, AND ARTICLE MENTIONS THAT SOME BENINESE WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN FOREIGN EMBASSIES WOULD SOON BE JOINING THEIR

COUNTRYMEN AT LYCEE D'ETAT DE L'ZSTUAIRE. PRESS REPORT CONCLUDES
WITH UNEQUIVOCAL STATEMENT BY GENDARMERIE NATIONAL GENERAL NEONGO
THAT GOVERNMENT IS IN FIRM CONTROL OF SITUATION FROM BEGINNING TO END

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AMZMBASSY COTONOU 2090

WMZMBASSY KHARTOUM 0700

AMZMBASSY KINSHASA 19590

AMEMBASSY LOME

WMEMBASSY PARIS 2603

WMZMBASSY RABAT 143

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E.O. 11652: GDA

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KINSHASA FOR RSO

7. COMMENT: IT NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR WHY BONGO DECIDED IT WAS
NECESSARY STATE HIS CASE TO ALL HIS FELLOW AFRICAN CHIEFS OF
STATE UNLESS BONGO BELIEVES HE HAS BEEN GETTING BAD PRESS OUTSIDE
OF GABON AND WANTED SET RECORD STRAIGHT TO EFFECT THAT WHILE
GABON HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO OPT FOR REPATRIATION, IN FACE OF
UNACCEPTABLE PROVOCATION BY KEREKOU, SITUATION IS WELL UNDER
CONTROL AND GABON REMAINS HAVEN OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY. MESSAGE
IS NONETHELESS SLIGHTLY DEFENSIVE IN TONE AND SUGGESTS THAT
BONGO MAY BE COMING TO REALIZE HE HAS MAKINGS OF KING-SIZED
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HEADACHE ON HIS HANDS. IT ONE THING TO ORDER REPATRIATION. IT QUITE ANOTHER TO GET THEM OUT, AND THE LONGER THEY REMAIN IN CAMPS IN GABON, THE MORE THE POTENTIAL FOR EVENTUAL TROUBLE. PRESS REPORTS CONTINUE STRESS MEDICAL AND SANITARY PRECAUTIONS BEING TAKEN BY GABONESE AT CAMP IN LIBREVILLE. BUT THESE COULD VERY WELL IN TIME BREAK DOWN. CLEARLY HOW TO EFFECT REPATRIATION HAS NOT BEEN DECIDED. BONGO WOULD CERTAINLY PREFER THAT BENIN SEND AIRCRAFT, BUT THERE NO INDICATION THUS FAR THAT BENIN IW WILLING DO THAT. EVENTUALLY BONGO MAY HAVE TO USE HIS OWN AIRCRAFT OR FIND A SHIP SOMESHRE. IN THAT CASE, WE MAY FIND THAT ACTUAL NUMBERS TO BE REPATRIATED MAY SHRINK CONSIDERABLY AND THAT GOG WILL FIND IN CONVENIENT TO PERMIT SOME OF THOSE TABBED FOR REPATRIATION TO STAY IF THEY WISH.

8. MAJOR USANSWERED QUESTION IS HOW MUCH OF THIS HAD BONGO'S OWN BLESSING. PROCESS BEGAN BEFORE HIS RETURN FROM KHARTOUM AND ON ARRIVAL BONGO STATED PUBLICLY THAT "HE DISAPPROVED OF WHAT GABONESE HAD DONE IN HIS ABSENCE." HE NONETHELESS QUICKLY MADE IT CLEAR HE SUPPORTED HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS. WHETHER HE IN FACT DID SO OR EVEN ORDERED THEM BEFORE HIS RETURN DESPITE HIS REMARK UPON ARRIVAL, WE DO NOT KNOW. OUR GUESS AT THIS STAGE IS THAT AS ONE OF THE FEW GABONESE CONSCIOUS OF GABON'S IMAGE ABROAD, AND AS MAN WHO HAS FREQUENTLY TOLD ME THAT GOVERNMENTS SHOULD FIND WAYS TO ACCOMODATE OPPONENTS AS HE DID IN PAST, MASS EXPATRIATION IS SOMEWHAT OUT OF CHARACTER. THUS WHILE HE MAY HAVE INSTRUCTED PARTY AND GOVERNMENT TO TO HASSLE LOCAL BENINESE SOME, HE MAY HAVE BEEN TELLING TRUTH WHEN HE SAID HE "DISAPPROVED" OF MEASURES TAKEN, BUT FOUND HIMSELF WITH NO CHOICE EXCEPT TO RATIFY WHAT HAD ALREADY BEEN IN EFFECT DECIDED. RESULT NOW IS SITUATION HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED AVOID, BUT CANNOT. SOME AT LEAST, OF BENINESE WILL HAVE TO GO. TIENKEN

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